

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Communicable Disease Control

Anthrax

(malignant edema, woolsorters disease)

What is anthrax?

Anthrax is a bacterial disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis* that can infect all warm blooded animals including man.

Who gets anthrax?

Anthrax is primarily an occupational disease. It is occasionally identified in individuals who are exposed to dead animals and animal products such as wool and hair.

How is anthrax spread?

The anthrax bacteria can live in the soil for many years. Man may become infected with anthrax by inhaling contaminated soil particles or by handling wool hair, wool, hair, or tissues from diseased animals. Infection of the intestinal tract can occur by eating undercooked meat from diseased animals.

What are the symptoms of anthrax?

The symptoms vary depending upon the type of exposure. With skin exposure, a boil-like lesion appears which eventually forms a black center. Swelling of the lymph glands may occur. With respiratory exposure, symptoms may resemble the common cold and may progress to severe breathing problems and even death.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

A few hours to 7 days; most cases occur within 48 hours of exposure.

When and for how long is a person able to spread anthrax?

Transmission from person to person is very rare.

Does past infection with anthrax make a person immune?

A second attack can occur, but is rare.

What is the treatment for anthrax?

Specific antibiotics are prescribed.

What can be the effect of not being treated for anthrax?

The disease could be fatal in untreated cases.

What can be done to prevent the spread of anthrax?

Anthrax vaccine is available for people in high-risk occupations. Other preventive measures include: vaccination of animals at risk, education of workers who process raw animal products, and continuing medical supervision of animals.